

★★★★☆ **'One Foot in the Black' shows both of the Author's Feet on Solid Ground**, May 24, 2008

By [Grady Harp](#) (Los Angeles, CA United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

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Kurt Kamm may be new to the published writing field but his initial entry, ONE FOOT IN THE BLACK, is a solid one. Kamm manages to give insight into the dangerous field of firefighting in the notorious hot bed of California's 'other disaster' while at the same time carefully exploring the influence of parental imprinting and lasting psychic injury from distant or abusive fathers. The melding of these two topics makes Kamm's first novel a strong entry into the literary arena.

Kamm's choice of location for this story - California, the land of beautiful landscapes and vistas chewed almost every year by cruel wildfires fanned by the ever-threatening Santana winds- provides an apt background for his tale of a young graduate - Greg Kowalski - from a Saginaw, Michigan high school who flees his emotionally abusive firefighter father to prove himself a worthy man as a firefighter in California. The journey toward manhood includes thwarted love relationships, the fragile discovery of true family life, the rigors of militaristic firefighter training, the physically challenging aspects of facing the powerful terror of firestorms, the bonding and camaraderie with his fellow firefighters (as well as the fraternity hazing incidents that help mold Greg's maturing response toward becoming an adult), and the agony of facing the bitter consequences of losing his best friend to the fire monster he fights. In a manner of 240 pages Kamm creates a dramatic story of one man's struggle for finding his identity as well as writing an informative and obviously well researched examination of the art and danger of firefighting.

Kamm has the gift to tell a story well: his grace in writing will doubtless move into a more sophisticated realm as he moves to his next book. The flaws here are those of pacing and disruption of story flow, a factor the author elects to overcome by naming each chapter with the names of towns that reference his character's development - not a bad technique but one that prevents steady growth of character development in favor of episodic asides that slow the momentum of the story. This is a minor, fixable flaw, and one that in the end does not detract from the fact that Kurt Kamm obviously has the talent to write exciting, stimulating, and instructive novels. Grady Harp, May 08